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ABSTRACT

In this curriculum unit, students will explore fiction writing in three lessons--characterization, setting, and plot. The unit intends for them to learn how to use characterization, dialogue, point of view and other literary devices in fiction writing. Each of the lessons offers an overview; suggests length and grade level; lists subjects and subtopics; cites dimensions of learning and intelligences being addressed; notes equipment and materials needed; lists teacher resources; and addresses National Standards for Arts Education and other standards. Each lesson also identifies instructional objectives and strategies; provides a detailed, step-by-step instructional plan; suggests assessment and extension activities; and contains teacher references. Attached are guidelines for writing dialogue and constructing a plot, writing assignments, and standards for developing scoring rubrics. (NKA)

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ED 475 410

Fiction Writing
Characterization [and] Plot [and] Setting

ArtsEdge Curricula, Lessons and Activities

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
National Endowment for the Arts
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CS 511 344

The Kennedy Center ARTSEDGE WORLDCOM

Curricula, Lessons and Activities

Fiction Writing: Characterization

Resource Type: lesson

Length: 1-3 days

Grade: 6,7,8

Subjects: Language Arts, Performing Arts

Subtopics: English, Theater

Intelligences Being Addressed:

- Interpersonal Intelligence
- Intrapersonal Intelligence
- Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence
- Visual/Spatial Intelligence

Dimensions of Learning:

- Acquisition and integration of knowledge
- Attitudes and perceptions about learning

Overview: In this lesson, students will explore characterization as an element of fiction. They will learn how authors use characterization, dialogue, and point of view to reveal a character. They will then experiment with constructing characters of their own.

Equipment:

- Computer : Mac or PC with Internet access

Media & Materials:

Printouts: This lesson has printouts. They are referenced in the "Student Supplies" or "Other Materials" sections below.

Student Supplies: Ruled paper
Pens and/or pencils

Other Materials:

- Examples of vivid character descriptions from famous literary works, such as *Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens.
- Handout: Guidelines and Assignment for Writing Dialogue
- Handout: Point of View Writing Assignment
- Handout: Revealing a Character: An Example

Related Textbooks:

Cassedy, Sylvia. *In Your Own Words*. New York: Harper & Row Junior Books, 1990.

Chaparro, Jacqueline L. and Mary Ann Trost. *Reading Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1989.

Dodd, Anne Wescott. *Write Now*. New York: Glove Book Company, Inc., 1973.

Introducing Literature (Macmillan Literature Series). Mission Hills, CA: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.

Teacher Internet Resources:

Lesson and Extension Specific Resources:

- **Elements of Fiction**
  http://www.tulane.edu/~walker/elements.htm

  This page contains concise, useful definitions of the elements of fiction, including plot, characterization, setting,

and theme.

General Internet Resources:

- **AskERIC Lesson Plans Language Arts/Writing**
  http://www.askeric.org/cgi-bin/lessons.cgi/Language_Arts/Writing

  AskEric provides a valuable list of language arts/writing lessons ranging in grades 1-12, including such topics as Ancient Egypt, creative writing, fairy tales, biographies, folktales, and poetry.

- **WriteNet**
  http://www.twc.org/forums/

  This Web site was designed for teachers interested in teaching imaginative writing. At WriteNet, writers and teachers can share ideas on teaching creative writing in the schools, and administrators can share valuable administrative advice.

National Standards for Arts Education:

- 5-8 Theatre Content Standard 1 : Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

Click here for additional information on the National Standards for Arts Education

Other National Standards:

- Language Arts (Writing) #1, #2, #3, #4

Source of Standards: ArtsEdge, McREL

For more on the Standards in other subjects, please refer to the Mid-continent Regional Education Laboratory (McREL) website.

State Standards, if any:

To search the State Arts Standards, please visit the National Conference of State Legislatures website.

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Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- demonstrate the ability to write for the purpose of expressing personal ideas.
- explore the elements of fiction: setting, character and plot.
- write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, and beyond.

Strategies:

Independent practice
Teacher-directed activities

Instructional Plan:

Establish with students that characterization is one of the the elements of fiction. A character is a person or animal who takes part in the action of a work of literature. Generally, the plot of a short story focuses on one character—the main character. A story may also have one or more minor characters. They keep the action moving forward and help the reader learn more about the main character. A character is not usually described in a story all at one time. Rather, the information is given to the reader in pieces and clues throughout the story. Sometimes, however, it may be necessary to give a short sketch of your main character at or near the beginning of the story.

Characterization

Characterization is the use of literary techniques to reveal the nature of a character. A writer may reveal a character in four different ways. The writer may:

1. describe the character's appearance.
2. report the character's speech and behavior.
3. describe the reactions of other characters to the individual.
4. reveal the character's thoughts and feelings.

Most authors use a combination of methods. Refer to the handout, Revealing a Character: An Example, and read to students a passage in which all four techniques are used to characterize a girl named Kelly who is visiting Sally O'Brien, her best friend. In the passage, Mrs. O'Brien is Sally's grandmother.

Show the students the following statements, and have them point out the lines from the excerpt that prove the statement and name

the method or methods of characterization used.

1. Kelly has a ponytail.
2. Kelly thinks that Mrs. O'Brien has a sour face.
3. Kelly is concerned about Sally.
4. Sally's mother was nice to Kelly.

Have students try one (or more) of the following writing assignments:

- Write a characterization of someone you know. Let the reader decide from your writing what kind of person you are describing. Show, do not tell.
- Create a character. Describe your character completely. Use details that help your readers imagine completely your creature or person.
- Describe a person or character whose physical appearance impressed you. The person may have been stunning, extraordinarily plain, physically challenged, cruel or sinister looking, etc. In what kind of mystery/riddle could the character be involved?

On each of several slips of paper, write five adjectives that might describe a person. Then divide the class into groups of four and give each group a list. Have each group create a character who illustrates its list of adjectives but without using the actual adjectives. Then have each group read its characterization aloud so other students can attempt to determine which adjectives the character exemplifies. If time allows, try a variation of this activity. Give every group a list of the same adjectives; the class could then analyze differences in the ways that different groups illustrated the same characteristics.

Charles Dickens excelled at creating vivid characters. Have students read the descriptions of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* or Mr. Micawber or Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*, paying particular attention to Dickens's word choice and the other ways in which he revealed his characters.

As a further exercise, have students clip animal photographs from newspapers or magazines and write brief journal entries that seem to fit the postures or expressions.

Dialogue

Explain to students that dialogue is a conversation between two or

more characters. Dialogue can reveal the moods and personalities of the characters:

"I came to tell you I'm sorry," said Jim.

"BE QUIET!" Nancy screamed.

Dialogue can also reveal who the characters are, and where:

"The one thing I hate about these trips," said Amanda, "is the cold. Each year the wind gets sharper and the air gets clammier. And my nose gets runnier. Next year I'm staying home."

"You can't do that," Becky answered. "People expect us to be out on this night."

"Well, there's no reason to travel like this. Everybody else flies in airplanes, with cushioned seats and food served on little trays. And movies. Why can't we have movies?"

"Be quiet, Amanda. How can you put a movie screen on a broomstick?" said Becky with a sniff.

Dialogue can tell you what's going on:

"Harold! Please get that parakeet out of my hair!"

"Yes, Mrs. Halloway, I'll try. But I think he has his foot caught in that comb thing on the back of your head."

Point out to students that different kinds of people use different kinds of speech. Also, a person's speech changes according to the situation. Speech reflects where the characters are living and when. For example, a girl of the Civil War period would not use twentieth-century slang. Distribute the student handout containing gudelines for writing dialogue and the choices for writing assignment topics. Students should complete one or more of the writing assignments outlined on the handout.

Point of View

Explain that "point of view" refers to the perspective from which a story is told. The writer chooses a narrator for every story. The narrator tells the story from either the first-person or the third-person point of view. The author's choice of narrator for a story determines the amount of information a reader will be given. The

following are the four major points of view:

1. *first person*: The narrator ("I") is a character in the story who can reveal only personal thoughts and feelings and what he or she sees and is told by other characters.

2. *third-person objective*: The narrator is an outsider who can report only what he or she sees and hears.

3. *third-person limited*: The narrator is an outsider who sees into the mind of one of the characters.

4. *third-person omniscient*: The narrator is an all-knowing outsider who can enter the minds of more than one of the characters.

The four passages that follow tell the same incident from different points of view. Notice how the amount of information given about each character depends upon the point of view used.

1. As I placed the carefully wrapped package on the park bench, I looked up and saw Molly walking across the street. I hoped that she hadn't seen me. (first-person)

2. As George placed the carefully wrapped package on the park bench, he looked up and saw Molly walking across the street. (third-person objective)

3. George, anxiously hoping that no one was watching him, placed a carefully wrapped package on an empty park bench. When he looked around, he saw Molly watching him from across the street. (third-person limited)

4. George, anxiously hoping that no one was watching him, placed a carefully wrapped package on an empty park bench. Molly, who was walking home, saw him and couldn't help thinking that he was acting strangely. (third-person omniscient)

Have students complete one or more of the following assignments (instructions also included on the accompanying handout):

1. Write a piece of fiction based on an ancient or historical event. Imagine what the story behind this event might be. Write a paragraph of first-person narration. Use first-person pronouns to describe events and thoughts. Think of an exciting, funny, or special event in your own life. Describe the event from your point of view. Next, write a third-person paragraph about the event. This

paragraph will use the pronouns he, she, it, or they to describe the event. How do the two paragraphs differ?

2. Write a brief, first-person narrative of a teenager describing his or her test for a driver's license. In the first version, the narrator is telling a friend about the test; in the second, the narrator is the teenager's parents; in the third, it is the driver education teacher. (For this assignment, have students discuss the characteristics of each narrative, analyzing the different voices of the narrator.)

3. Have you ever read a book or article written from the point of view of a plant or animal? What was your reaction? How was the effect different from what it would have been if the perspective were that of a human character? If your pet or the pet of someone you know well were to write a journal, what kinds of things might be included? What might an animal "comment on" that might not be noticed by humans? How might an animal understand everyday objects or events from the human world?

Select an animal and write a journal entry for yesterday from the animal's point of view, without specifically mentioning what kind of animal is "writing" the entry. Read your entry to the class and see if they can guess what type of animal wrote the entry. As you read, you will need to portray the characteristics of the animal that you are dramatizing.

Assessment: Assessment of student writing will occur through the social dynamics of the classroom (peer response, cooperative learning, student-teacher conferences, discussions, etc.). A scoring rubric and checklist will be developed with students to help evaluate their writing. See the sample rubrics for reference.

Extensions: Create a literary magazine for the class, where students' drawings and stories can be published.

Teacher References:

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Dickens, Charles *David Copperfield*. New York: Penguin, 1997.

Gregory, Cynde. *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing*. Barrytown, NY, Station Hill Press, 1990.

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York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1976.

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Willis, Meredith Sue, *Personal Fiction Writing*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1984.

"Writing." Delran, NJ: Weekly Reader Company; November 1993, December 1993, March 1994, April 1994, October 1994, March 1995, September 1995, April/May 1995, February 1996, and March 1996.

Author : Kathy Cook
Thomas Pullen Arts Magnet School
Landover MD

Review Date:

ARTSEDGENotes:

Revealing a Character: An Example

In the following passage, the author uses all four techniques (describing the character's appearance, reporting the character's speech and behavior, describing the reactions of other characters to the individual, and revealing the character's thoughts and feelings) to characterize Kelly, a girl who is visiting Sally O'Brien, her best friend. Mrs. O'Brien is Sally's grandmother.

"Good morning, Mrs. O'Brien."

"Goodness, you scared me! Where did you come from?"

"Across the street, of course," Kelly said.

"Don't be fresh, Kelly. How many times have I asked you to use the doorbell?"

Mrs. O'Brien rubbed her red, puffy eyes, and turned back to folding the tumble of fresh-smelling laundry in front of her.

"I suppose you want to see Sally," said Mrs. O'Brien, keeping her back to Kelly. "Well, I am afraid she's not feeling up to having visitors today."

"Again?" Kelly thought, twisting the loose strands of hair that had escaped from her ponytail. She knew she should probably just leave without a fuss. Ever since the funeral, it had been hard to talk to Sally anyway. All she did was sit in her room and play video games.

Kelly couldn't blame her. The O'Brien house just wasn't the same since Sally's mom died. Before then, Kelly never had to ring the bell. She just threw open the door and shouted for Sally to come out and play. While she was waiting, Sally's mom would greet her with a hug and maybe offer her a cookie that was still warm from the oven.

"Kelly, what are you standing there for?" snapped Mrs. OBrien, "Didn't you hear me? You can't see Sally today!"

At that moment, something inside Kelly snapped. She was sick of Mrs. O'Brien and her sour face. Sally was her best friend, and Kelly needed to make sure that she was okay. She was going to see her today—NOW.

Guidelines for Writing Dialogue

1. All words spoken by a character must be surrounded by quotation marks. A direct quotation can come at the beginning or the end of a sentence.

2. A direct quotation begins with a capital letter. If a quotation is interrupted, the second part begins with a lower-case letter.

3. A direct quotation is set off from the rest of a sentence by commas. If a direct quotation is interrupted, commas are placed before and after the interruption. The comma before a direct quotation falls outside the quotation marks. The comma—or any punctuation—after a direct quotation falls inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

> Ted smiled and thought, "I can't wait to get to the ball game!"
>
> "Yes, I am the one who baked the chocolate cake," admitted Granny
>
> "Jim," she said with a grin, "I'm going to make sure you lose this match."

4. Dialogue is less formal than other kinds of writing. To make your characters sound natural, you may use short sentences and contractions in dialogue.

5. In a conversation between characters, start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.

6. Be careful not to use the word "said" too often. Use other livelier verbs, such as "whispered," "yelled," "mumbled," "cried," and "confessed."

Writing Assignment

Complete one (or more) of the following assignments:

> 1. Create two characters: a younger person deeply in need of affection and warmth and an older person willing to give it. Write a one- to two-page conversation between the characters. The details (their relationship, situation, etc.) are up to you, but make the reader care.
>
> 2. Using yourself and your best friends as the models, try writing a fictionalized conversation among three or more characters. Try to capture the style of your crowd's real-life speech: slang, rhythms, who interrupts whom, etc.

3. Write a dialogue between abstract characters, such as Love and Hate, Happiness and Sadness, Greed and Generosity, etc.

Writing Assignment: Point of View

1. Write a piece of fiction based on an ancient or historical event. Imagine what the story behind this thing or event might be. Write a paragraph of first-person narration. Use first-person pronouns to describe events and thoughts. Think of an exciting, funny or special event in your own life. Describe the event from your point of view. Next, write a third-person paragraph about the event. This paragraph will use the pronouns he, she, it, or they to describe the event. This paragraph will use the pronouns he, she, it, or they to describe the event. How do the two paragraphs differ?

2. Write a brief, first-person narrative of a teen describing his or her test for a driver's license. In the first version, the narrator is telling a friend about the test; in the second, the narrator is the teen's parents; in the third, it is the driver education teacher.

3. Have you ever read a book or article written from the point of view of a plant or animal? What was your reaction? How was the effect different from what it would have been if the perspective were that of a human character? If your pet or the pet of someone you know well were to write a journal, what kinds of things might be included? What might an animal "comment on" that might not be noticed by humans? How might an animal understand everyday objects or events from the human world? Select an animal and write a journal entry for yesterday from the animal's point of view, without specifically mentioning what kind of animal is "writing" the entry. Read your entry to the class and see if they can guess what type of animal wrote the entry. As you read, you will need to portray the characteristics of the animal that you are dramatizing.

Standards to Use When Developing Rubrics with Students

Scoring Rubric for Expressing Ideas Clearly	
4	Clearly and effectively communicates the main idea or theme and provides support that contains rich, vivid, and powerful detail.
3	Clearly communicates the main idea or theme and provides suitable support and detail.
2	Communicates important information, but not a clear theme or overall structure.
1	Communicates information as isolated pieces in a random fashion.

Scoring Rubric for Effectively Communicating for a Variety of Purposes	
4	Clearly communicates a purpose in a highly creative and insightful manner.
3	Uses effective techniques to communicate a clear purpose.
2	Demonstrates an attempt to communicate for a specific purpose but makes significant errors or omissions.
1	Demonstrates no central purpose in the communication or makes no attempt to articulate a purpose.

Scoring Rubric for Creating Quality Written Products	
4	Clearly communicates a purpose in a highly creative and insightful manner.
3	Uses effective techniques to communicate a clear purpose.
2	Demonstrates an attempt to communicate for a specific purpose but makes significant errors or omissions.
1	Demonstrates no central purpose in the communication or makes no attempt to articulate a purpose.

The Kennedy Center ARTSEDGE

Curricula, Lessons and Activities

Fiction Writing: Plot
(Part of Curriculum Unit Fiction Writing)

Resource Type: lesson

Length: 1-3 days

Grade: 6,7,8

Subjects: Language Arts

Subtopics: English, Literature

Intelligences Being Addressed:
- Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence

Dimensions of Learning:
- Acquisition and integration of knowledge
- Attitudes and perceptions about learning

Overview: In this lesson, students will explore plot as an element of fiction. They will explore how details and events are selected and arranged to contribute to the outcome of the story.

Equipment:

- Computer : Mac or PC with Internet access

Media & Materials:

Printouts: This lesson has printouts. They are referenced in the "Student Supplies" or "Other Materials" sections below.

Student Supplies: Ruled paper
Pens and/or pencils

Other Materials:

- Handout: General Guidelines for Plot Building
- Handout: Writing Assignment
- Sample rubrics for use with students

Related Textbooks:

Cassedy, Sylvia. *In Your Own Words*. New York: Harper & Row Junior Books, 1990.

Chaparro, Jacqueline L. and Mary Ann Trost. *Reading Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1989.

Dodd, Anne Wescott. *Write Now*. New York: Glove Book Company, Inc., 1973.

Introducing Literature (Macmillan Literature Series). Mission Hills, CA: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.

Teacher Internet Resources:

Lesson and Extension Specific Resources:

- **Elements of Fiction**
  http://www.tulane.edu/~walker/elements.htm

  This page contains concise, useful definitions of the elements of fiction, including plot, characterization, setting, and theme.

General Internet Resources:

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  http://www.askeric.org/cgi-bin/lessons.cgi/Language_Arts/Writing

  AskEric provides a valuable list of language arts/writing lessons ranging in grades 1-12, including such topics as Ancient Egypt, creative writing, fairy tales, biographies, folktales, and poetry.

- **WriteNet**
  http://www.twc.org/forums/

  This Web site was designed for teachers interested in teaching imaginative writing. At WriteNet, writers and teachers can share ideas on teaching creative writing in the schools, and administrators can share valuable administrative advice.

National Standards for Arts Education:

- 5-8 Theatre Content Standard 1 : Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history
- 5-8 Theatre Content Standard 2 : Acting by developing basic acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes
- 5-8 Theatre Content Standard 3 : Designing by developing environments for improvised and scripted scenes

Click here for additional information on the National Standards for Arts Education

Other National Standards:

- Language Arts (Writing) #1, #2, #3, #4

Source of Standards: ArtsEdge, McREL

For more on the Standards in other subjects, please refer to the Mid-continent Regional Education Laboratory (McREL) website.

State Standards, if any:

To search the State Arts Standards, please visit the National Conference of State Legislatures website.

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Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- demonstrate the ability to write for the purpose of expressing personal ideas.
- explore plot as an element of fiction
- write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, and beyond.

Strategies:

Independent practice
Teacher-directed activities
Hands-on activity
Cooperative pairs

Instructional Plan:

Establish with students that plot, one of the elements of fiction, is the sequence of events in a story. It is the writer's plan for what happens when and to whom. Plot centers on some internal or external conflict. In a carefully constructed plot, details and events are selected and arranged in a cause-effect relationship so that each is a necessary link leading to the outcome of the story. The events usually follow a pattern: a situation is established; a conflict or problem arises; certain events bring about a climax, or a character takes a decisive action; and the conflict is resolved (resolution).

A. Conflict

In the plot, the writer develops a conflict—a struggle between opposing forces. It creates tension and suspense in a story. Sometimes there may be only one main conflict. Sometimes characters may be involved in several conflicts.

1. *External Conflict*: In this type of conflict, a character struggles with some outside person or force. One character may oppose another character. Sometimes a character struggles against a force such as a blizzard, a flood, poverty, etc.

2. *Internal Conflict*: In this type of conflict, a struggle takes place within the mind of a character. For example, the character might struggle with himself or herself to do the right thing.

B. Climax

The climax, or turning point, is the high point of interest or

suspense in a story. It takes place when the reader experiences the greatest emotional response to a character's problem, when the situation is such that the conflict must be resolved one way or another, or when a character starts to take a decisive action to end the conflict.

C. Resolution

The resolution is the point in the plot at which the loose ends are tied up. The conflict is resolved and closure occurs.

D. Types of Plots

A plot moves a story from point A to point Z. Some commonly used plot patterns that move stories include the following:

1. from problem to solution
2. from mystery to solution
3. from conflict to peace
4. from danger to safety
5. from confusion to order
6. from dilemma to decision
7. from ignorance to knowledge
8. from questions to answers

Ask students the following discussion questions:

Think about the plots of some of your favorite books. Can you pick out which plot pattern or patterns are at work in each of them? Do your favorite books tend to have similar plot patterns or a wide variety of them? Why do you think a certain type of plot appeals to you?

E. General Guidelines for Plot Building (These are also included in the accompanying student handout).

1. Let characters influence the plot. Think about the characters in a particular situation, and plot ideas will emerge. Suspense author Andre Jute says, "Plot flows most easily and genuinely from character . . . and the actions characters undertake because of the relationships they have and the frictions built into such contact. On the other hand, if you first work out the plot and then simply people it with characters who can carry out the actions you've dreamed up, your characters will seem wooden and unreal."

2. Avoid too much plot. Don't create a crisis every two pages, too many characters and story lines, characters that are "in action" so much they do not have time to think, etc. Many writers go back through a first draft and look for story lines, characters, and plot events they can cut to improve the story's focus on the theme.
3. Know when to start the story. The action of your story should begin at the point at which the characters start moving toward the end of it. For example, a story about a family coping with the breakup of the parents' marriage might begin on the day one parent moves out.
4. Let readers wait. Anticipation is part of the fun for readers. Readers get involved because they want to know what happens to the characters. If you answer that question too soon, you may have to dream up another plot to finish the story.
5. Pace the plot. Think of your plot as having a kind of wave motion: with ups and downs, action sequences and calm scenes (sitting, talking, thinking, etc.), and tension that builds up, comes to a crest, and then settles down. This kind of pacing sets your reader up for the final climax.
6. Let your characters grow. In most stories, plot is about how life affects people or characters. Between the beginning and the end of your story, your main characters should learn, grow, and be in some way affected by the events they have just lived through.

Have students complete one of the writing activities on the accompanying handout.

Have the students share their stories with the class. The students will select one story to turn into a small play. (If necessary, divide the class into small groups and let them work on adapting different stories.) Allow students to create simple costumes and props to support the production. This can be done in class or at home. If possible, arrange for the students to perform the play for a kindergarten or lower-grade class within the school.

Assessment: Assessment of student writing will occur through the social dynamics of the classroom (peer response, cooperative learning, student-teacher conferences, discussions, etc.) A scoring rubric and checklist will be developed with students to help evaluate their writing. See the sample rubrics for reference.

Extensions: Create a literary magazine for the class, in which students' drawings and stories can be published.

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Klugerman, Rita, et al. *Globe Writing Program, Book A.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Book Company, 1989.

Gregory, Cynde. *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing.* Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1990.

Hubert, Karen M. *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction.* New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1976.

Mellon, Nancy, *Storytelling and the Art of Imagination*, Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1992.

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Author : Kathy Cook
Thomas Pullen Arts Magnet School
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Review Date:

ARTSEDGENotes:

General Guidelines for Plot Building

1. *Let characters influence the plot.*

Characters develop out of the situation for a story. Think about the characters in a particular situation, and plot ideas will emerge. Suspense author Andre Jute says, "Plot flows most easily and genuinely from character . . . and the actions characters undertake because of the relationships they have and the frictions built into such contact. On the other hand, if you first work out the plot and then simply people it with characters who can carry out the actions you've dreamed up, your characters will seem wooden and unreal."

2. *Avoid too much plot.*

Don't create a crisis every two pages, too many characters and story lines, characters that are "in action" so much they do not have time to think, etc. Many writers go back through a first draft and look for story lines, characters, and plot events they can cut to improve the story's focus on the theme.

3. *Know when to start the story.*

The action of your story should begin at the point at which the characters start moving toward the end of it. For example, a story about a family coping with the breakup of the parents' marriage might begin on the day one parent moves out.

4. *Let readers wait.*

Anticipation is part of the fun for readers. Readers get involved because they want to know what happens to the characters. If you answer that question too soon, you may have to dream up another plot to finish the story.

5. *Pace the plot.*

Think of your plot as having a kind of wave motion: with ups and downs, action sequences and calm scenes (sitting, talking, thinking, etc.), and tension that builds up, comes to a crest, and then settles down. This kind of pacing sets your reader up for the final climax.

6. *Let your characters grow.*

In most stories, plot is about how life affects people or characters. Between the beginning and the end of your story, your main characters should learn, grow, and be in some way affected by the events they have just lived through.

Writing Assignment

Choose and complete *one* of the following assignments:

1. Select a portrait—a painting or a photograph—and write a brief story featuring the subject of the portrait, adding traits such as height or tone of voice. Use the basic elements of a story: setting, character, plot, conflict, climax, and resolution. The main character should be revealed gradually through the elements of the story.

2. Write an original humorous toy story using your favorite childhood toys as characters. Make your story as original as possible.

3. Select one of the following beginnings as a starting place for your own story. Write a story, developing all the elements of fiction (setting, character, and plot):

> a. There once lived a King's son who had a bride whom he loved very much.
>
> b. There was once a wonderful musician, who went forlorn through a forest and thought of all manner of things, and when nothing was left for him to think about, he said: "Time is beginning to pass heavily on me here in the forest. I will fetch hither a good companion for myself."
>
> c. There was once upon a time an old queen who was ill, and thought to herself, "I am lying on what must be my deathbed."
>
> d. Once upon a time there was a girl who did nothing but spin and weave.

4. Provide the following endings and have students write a story that leads to this ending:

> a. On the rock, hidden beneath the Old Woman's rose bush, a tiny elf sat happily watching the party, one leg crossed over the other.
>
> b. She came out of the water and lay down in the grass under the dazzling golden light. She noticed all the fruit on the trees and many green birds in the trees. She saw people coming through the meadow. She went out to meet them. They came up to her and took her hands and embraced her.
>
> c. "I think we have learned much today," he said. They embraced and they danced for a long time between the darkness and the light.
>
> d. After ridding the castle of cobwebs and bandits, the prince and princess became king and queen of the land. At last, rule was restored and I imagine they are living there still.

5. Write a story in which your main character sees things with unusual clarity, as if from above, and says what he or she sees very plainly.

6. Write a story about someone or something that travels from a beloved home and, coming full circle, finds it unchanged.

7. Write a story about someone or something that leaves a beloved home and returns by the same route after a long time to find it almost unrecognizable.

8. Create an imaginary mountain that you would truly like to visit. What is its dominant color? Who and/or what inhabits this place? How do you get there? What treasure is held there? Cast this mountain into a story. In front of the mountain, imagine two or three giants or other guards who must be outwitted or understood in order to pass safely through the heights and depths of your mountain.

9. Write a story of a noble traveler who has gone in search of a key to an important place that has been locked up perhaps for a very long time. He or she will have to overcome obstacles on the way; helpers will have to come forward to solve riddles and show the way. In the course of your story, you can discover where, and why, the key had been hidden or lost.

10. Write the story of a very beautiful palace that is turned into a hovel by a wicked enchantment. Who comes to break the enchantment and set things right?

11. Write a story about a creature who so longs to become human and possess human qualities that it overcomes all obstacles and throws off its animal nature.

12. Write a story about a dragon that is holding an individual, a family, or a whole town in terror. Create a hero or heroine, or both together, who meet this dragon and successfully absorb its power as their own, putting its power compassionately and cleverly in the service of others.

Standards to Use When Developing Rubrics with Students

Scoring Rubric for Expressing Ideas Clearly	
4	Clearly and effectively communicates the main idea or theme and provides support that contains rich, vivid, and powerful detail.
3	Clearly communicates the main idea or theme and provides suitable support and detail.
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4	Clearly communicates a purpose in a highly creative and insightful manner.
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The Kennedy Center ARTSEDGE WORLDCOM

Curricula, Lessons and Activities

Fiction Writing: Setting
(Part of Curriculum Unit Fiction Writing)

Resource Type: lesson

Length: 1-3 days

Grade: 6,7,8

Subjects: Language Arts, Visual Arts

Subtopics: Drawing, English, Literature

Intelligences Being Addressed:
- Interpersonal Intelligence
- Intrapersonal Intelligence
- Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence
- Visual/Spatial Intelligence

Dimensions of Learning:
- Acquisition and integration of knowledge
- Attitudes and perceptions about learning

Overview: In this lesson, students will explore setting as an element of fiction. They will learn how authors manipulate time and space, mood, and spatial order in descriptions of settings.

Equipment:

- Computer : Mac or PC with Internet access

Media & Materials:

Printouts: This lesson has printouts. They are referenced in the "Student Supplies" or "Other Materials" sections below.

Student Supplies:

- Drawing paper
- Ruled paper
- Pens
- Markers and/or colored pencils

Other Materials:

- A short passage from an illustrated children's book (of the teacher's choosing) that describes a setting.
- Sample Assessment Rubrics

Related Textbooks:

Cassedy, Sylvia. *In Your Own Words*. New York: Harper & Row Junior Books, 1990.

Chaparro, Jacqueline L., and Mary Ann Trost. *Reading Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, Littell & Company, 1989.

Dodd, Anne Wescott. *Write Now*. New York: Glove Book Company, Inc., 1973.

Introducing Literature (Macmillan Literature Series). Mission Hills, CA: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.

Teacher Internet Resources:

Lesson and Extension Specific Resources:

- **Elements of Fiction**
  http://www.tulane.edu/~walker/elements.htm

  This page contains concise, useful definitions of the

elements of fiction, including plot, characterization, setting, and theme.

General Internet Resources:

- **AskERIC Lesson Plans Language Arts/Writing**
  http://www.askeric.org/cgi-bin/lessons.cgi/Language_Arts/Writing

  AskEric provides a valuable list of language arts/writing lessons ranging in grades 1-12, including such topics as Ancient Egypt, creative writing, fairy tales, biographies, folktales, and poetry.

- **WriteNet**
  http://www.twc.org/forums/

  This Web site was designed for teachers interested in teaching imaginative writing. At WriteNet, writers and teachers can share ideas on teaching creative writing in the schools, and administrators can share valuable administrative advice.

National Standards for Arts Education:

- 5-8 Visual Art Content Standard 3 : Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
- 5-8 Visual Art Content Standard 5 : Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Click here for additional information on the National Standards for Arts Education

Other National Standards:

- Language Arts (Writing) #1, #2, #3, #4

Source of Standards: ArtsEdge, McREL

For more on the Standards in other subjects, please refer to the Mid-continent Regional Education Laboratory (McREL) website.

State Standards, if any:

To search the State Arts Standards, please visit the National Conference of State Legislatures website.

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Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- demonstrate ability to write for the purpose of expressing personal ideas.
- explore the elements of fiction: setting, character, and plot.
- write for a variety of audiences: peers, teachers, parents, school-wide community, etc.

Strategies:

Independent practice
Teacher-directed activities
Hands-on activity
Cooperative pairs

Instructional Plan:

Read a passage from an illustrated children's book that introduces the setting. Do not show students the illustration. Have students sketch the setting, based on the information in the description. Allow students to share the pictures. Have them explain why they drew the setting the way that they did. What words or phrases influenced their interpretation amd depiction of the setting? Show the illustration in the book. Discuss similarities and differences among the all of the drawings.

Establish with students that setting, one of the elements of fiction, is the time and place of the action of a story. The setting may be specific and detailed and introduced at the very beginning of the story, or it may be merely suggested through the use of details scattered throughout the story. Customs, manners, clothing, scenery, weather, geography, buildings, and methods of transportation are all part of setting. The importance of setting differs from story to story. Sometimes the setting is fairly unimportant, as in most fables. In other stories, the setting is very important. It may have an effect on the events of the plot, reveal character, or create a certain atmosphere. Discuss the specific elements of setting, which are outlined below.

Time and Place

Read the following passage to students:

On a rainy November morning in 1776, a soldier trod a solitary path along a road in western Virginia. His gait was slow, and his face—barely visible beneath untold layers of grime—betrayed an anguished, exhausted expression.

Ask students the following:

1. Where does the story take place? What details tell you this?
2. When do the events of this story take place? What clues tell you so?

Have students complete one of the following writing activities:

1. Write a description of a place—real or imaginary—that you would like to visit. The description should include the name of the place, as well as a description of the inhabitants, the landscape, the weather, and any other factors that might be important to developing an understanding of this place.
2. Write two descriptions of the same place—for example, your home. The first description should be told from the perspective of a child, and the second should be written as if an adult were viewing the home.
3. Write a description of a favorite person in a natural setting that seems "right" for that person's character. Then write a description of a person who doesn't fit into a natural setting.
4. Authors often use similes and metaphors to describe the setting in a vivid and colorful way. For example, a writer might say, "The thunder claps stampeded across the sky like a herd of wild buffalo." Write a description of a weather phenomenon using an animal to make the description more vivid.
5. Write a description of an ideal outdoor spot—real or imagined. Use vivid details to describe light, water, plants, rocks, etc. Incorporate personification.

Mood

Establish with students that the setting can help develop and establish the mood of a story. A vivid description of the setting will help the reader to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the environment of the story.

Share with students the following passage:

It was a cold and cheerless evening. The fog seemed to hover over the street, clutching the buildings, the streetlamps—the entire city—in a damp, icy grip. If one were to stand still, passers-by would emerge briefly from the gloom, only to disappear from view after taking just a few steps. These ghostly apparitions tormented

James as he impatiently waited for his valet to return with his carriage.

(Note: For another good example of an author's use of setting to create mood, see Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Have students read and respond to representative passages describing London on Christmas Eve.)

Ask students the following:

1. What sensory details does the author use to draw the reader into the setting?
2. What mood do these details help create?

Have students complete one of the following writing activities:

1. Post a picture of a group of people, perhaps in a city or town or at a public event such as a baseball game. Have each student write two descriptions of the scene, one happy and the other sad or ominous.
2. Describe a familiar place, such as a classroom or a mall, under two different sets of circumstances, such as day and night, summer and winter, or crowded and empty.
3. Write a description of a festive holiday scene. Use details that appeal to your reader's five senses. Show your reader a picture of holiday foods, music, colors, etc., that is appropriate to the mood you are trying to create. Next, try writing a description of a dreary or scary holiday scene. Be sure to use appropriate sensory details again. The smells, tastes, sounds, objects, etc., should be very different from those you picked for your "festive" description. Can you create a story that grows out of one or both of these descriptions?
4. Think of a natural setting that has affected you. The place may be one you visited on vacation once, one you visit frequently, or perhaps it is even your backyard. How does this place affect your thoughts, feelings, mood, and actions? Write an autobiographical piece describing how this setting interacts with your thoughts and/or the actions of your characters.

Spatial Order

Establish with students that there are several ways to organize a description of a place. You could start at the right and move to the left. You could start at the top and move to the bottom. Or you

could start at the place closest to you and move to the place farthest from you, as in the following passage:

The door of the mansion dwarfed anyone who approached it. Even the tallest visitors had to reach up high to grasp the ornate door knocker (which *surely* was made of solid gold). The door swung open into a grand hallway, with floors of spotless pink marble. The walls were covered in gigantic mirrors, so that the foyer appeared to be at least three times larger than its already impressive size. At the end of the hallway, a grand white staircase spiraled up and up—so far that you might have expected an angel to greet you when you reached the top. But that was not so. The stairs actually led to a large, but surprisingly ordinary looking hallway with slightly worn, green carpeting and a long row of nearly identical doors. It almost resembled a hotel.

(Note: For another good example of a setting description that establishes spatial order, see J.R.R. Tolkein's description of a hobbit hole in *The Hobbit*.)

Have students complete the following writing activity:

Describe a place that is familiar to you. Organize your description from either right to left, top to bottom, or closest to farthest point from you. Choose the spatial order that makes your description easiest to understand.

Allow time for students to share one or more of their writing assignments with a classmate(s). You may wish to group students in pairs, having one student read a setting description while his/her partner sketches the scene described. Students should analyze the drawing to see where their interpretations were similar, where they differed, and why.

Assessment: Assessment of student writing will occur through the social dynamics of the classroom (peer response, cooperative learning, student-teacher conferences, discussions, etc.). A scoring rubric and checklist will be developed with students to help evaluate their writing. See the sample rubrics for reference.

Extensions: Create a literary magazine for the class, in which students' drawings and stories can be published.

Teacher References:

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Gregory, Cynde. *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing.* Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1990.

Hubert, Karen M. *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction.* New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1976.

Mellon, Nancy, *Storytelling and the Art of Imagination*, Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1992.

Millet, Nancy C., and Raymond J. Rodrigues. *Explorations in Literature.* Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Company, 1989.

Rico, Gabriele Lusser. *Writing the Natural Way.* Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983.

Tolkein, J.R.R. *The Hobbit.* New York: Random House, 1981.

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ARTSEDGENotes:

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